

Approved Meeting Minutes
 Joint Working Group (WG)/Science Coordination Group (SCG)
 West Palm Beach, Florida
 June 5, 2018

1. Welcome and Introductions

WG Chair COL Jason Kirk called the meeting to order at 10:00 am and welcomed everyone in attendance. He recognized Marshall Critchfield from the Department of the Interior and new WG member Eva Velez representing the SFWMD. Marshall Critchfield noted that Secretary Ryan Zinke recognizes the importance of Everglades restoration. James Erskine recognized Eric Sutton, newly conferred Executive Director for FWC. SCG Chair Nick Aumen and Terri Bates, sitting in for Susan Gray, also welcomed everyone. COL Kirk recognized Commissioner Sara Heard from Martin County and Commissioner Mike Sole from FWC who were in attendance. The draft agenda and meeting minutes were provided. Members were reminded of the next Task Force (TF) meeting to be held the following month in Washington, DC. COL Kirk recognized Ray Scott, who will be retiring from FDACS and Shannon Estenoz former Executive Director of the TF who now works for the Everglades Foundation. James Erskine recognized and thanked COL Kirk for his service on the WG and restoration of the South Florida Ecosystem. The WG and SCG members were asked to introduce themselves and provide brief introductory remarks.

Presentations and handouts from the meeting are available at:
<https://www.evergladesrestoration.gov/wgm/>

In Attendance:	June 5	Alternates
Working Group (WG) Members		
COL Jason Kirk – Chair - Corps of Engineers	√	
James Erskine - Vice Chair - FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Comm.	√	
Billy Causey - NOAA, Florida Keys Nat'l Marine Sanctuary	-	
Deb Drum – Palm Beach County	√	
Gene Duncan - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	-	
Rebecca Elliott - FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services	√	
Margaret Goodro - Biscayne National Park	-	
Cecelia Harper - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	√	
Veronica Harrell-James - U.S. Attorney's Office	√	
Lee Hefty - Miami Dade County	√	
Marjorie Kirby - FL Dept. of Transportation	√	
Cherise Maples - Seminole Tribe of Florida	-	
Russell Morgan - U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, NRCS	√	
Roland Ottolini - Lee County Division of Natural Resources	-	
Bonnie Ponwith - NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
Pedro Ramos - NPS, ENP & Dry Tortugas National Parks	√	
Leonard Rawlings - Bureau of Indian Affairs	-	
Barry Rosen - United States Geological Survey	√	
Edward Smith - Florida Department of Environmental Protection	√	
Joe Sullivan – U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA	√	
Eva Velez - South Florida Water Management District	√	

Larry Williams - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√
Vacant – Martin County	-
Vacant - Office of the Governor	-
Phil Everingham - Chair, BBRRCT, Special Advisory Group	√
Marshall Critchfield - U.S. Department of the Interior	√

Science Coordination Group (SCG) Members

Nick Aumen – Chair - United States Geological Survey	√	
Susan Gray - Vice Chair - South Florida Water Management District	-	Terri Bates
John Baldwin - Florida Atlantic University	-	Brian Benschoter
Joan Browder - NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service	-	
Amy Castaneda - Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida	-	
James Evans - City of Sanibel Natural Resources Department	√	
Jennifer Hecker – Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program	-	Liz Donnelly
Chris Kelble - NOAA, AOML	√	
Chad Kennedy - FL Dept. of Environmental Protection	√	
Cherise Maples - Seminole Tribe of Florida	-	
Gil McRae - FL Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	-	Penny Hall
Bob Progulske - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	√	
Gina Ralph - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	√	
Dave Rudnick - Everglades National Park, NPS	√	
Dan Scheidt - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	-	
Bob Johnson - U.S. Department of the Interior, Special Advisor	√	
Vacant - FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services	-	
Vacant - U.S. Department of Agriculture – NRCS	-	
Vacant - U.S. Department of Agriculture – ARS	-	

2. Program and Project Update

Corps Update - Howie Gonzales provided a presentation highlighting some recent successes. He provided an update on the Foundation Projects that included the Kissimmee River Restoration, Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park (ENP) and C-111 South Dade. He also provided an update on the first and second-generation Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects. The Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) was authorized in WRDA 2016 and develops the next increment of project components (CEPP South, CEPP North and CEPP New Water) that focus restoration on more natural flows into and through the central and southern Everglades. The CEPP South Validation Report was initiated in October 2017 and they expect to have the report completed in 2019. The Corps will then be able to request construction funds to execute a Project Partnership Agreement (PPA). The SFWMD is out in front looking at what elements they can construct in advance of the PPA. He reviewed the status of the SMART Planning Studies for the Loxahatchee River Watershed Restoration Project, Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project, and the Western Everglades Restoration Project. The FY18 federal construction budget is \$76.6 million and the FY19 budget is \$67.5 million. Budgets have been declining for the last several years. The O&M for CERP is cost shared 50/50 by the Corps and the local sponsor. The Corps is having some challenges with their O&M budget and they continue to communicate the importance of the O&M budget to their program. Key takeaways are the strong federal

interest, strategic partnerships, continued progress and the need for continued administration and Congressional funding to execute the contracts and achieve the benefits they know they can achieve.

SFWMD Update - Megan Jacoby provided a presentation that focused on the state's efforts. They currently have 57,000 acres of Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) to remove nutrients. From 1994 – 2017, 18.6 million acre-feet of water has been treated and 2,329 metric tons of phosphorus has been removed. It is projected that these STAs will remove 22 million pounds of phosphorus over the next 50 years. She reviewed the Restoration Strategies program which provides regional storage, treatment and conveyance projects to improve the quality of water going to the Everglades system. Updates were provided on the A-1 Flow Equalization Basin (FEB), L-8 FEB, S-375 Expansion (G-716), STA-1W Expansion #1 and #2, and G-341 Related Conveyance Improvements. CERP updates included the C-44 Reservoir/STA, C-43 Reservoir (Cell 1) and Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW) Phase 1.

James Evans asked about the FEB performance given the recent rains from tropical storms. He noted that the coastal communities are getting hammered. The City of Sanibel is getting some bad press both locally and nationally because of the discharges from the lake, recognizing that half of the flow they are receiving from the S-79 is coming from their own watershed. This will have a tremendous impact on their economy. They need to hold that water wherever they can or move it south, but the estuaries can't be the only outlet. Larry Williams asked about the requirements of the biological opinion for the Everglades Restoration Transition Plan (ERTP).

3. Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) Post Authorization Change Report (PACR) Update

Matt Morrison noted it was important to recognize they have had above normal rainfall over the last three years. Because of the way the C&SF system was designed, they don't have much of an alternative other than to discharge that flow to the northern estuaries. The good news is that there are projects either under construction or being planned. The C-43 Storage Reservoir on the Caloosahatchee and the C-44 Reservoir on the St. Lucie will help mitigate some of those damaging discharges. While CEPP provides some good benefits to the system when it comes to decreasing regulatory discharges to the northern estuaries and delivering the first increment of flow to the central Everglades, more needs to be done.

Matt provided a presentation reviewing the Florida law that directed the SFWMD to develop a CEPP PACR jointly with the USACE. The SFWMD and the USACE identified a Section 203 process which allows a non-federal sponsor like the SFWMD to develop feasibility reports for water resource projects and submit those directly to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (ASA CW) for Congressional approval. They followed the federal planning process to maintain the cost share eligibility. One of the benefits of the tentatively selected plan (TSP) Alternative C240A is that it increases southern storage that will mitigate those damaging discharges from Lake Okeechobee. It includes a storage capacity of at least 240,000 acre-feet along with the necessary water quality treatment and conveyance features. This is the next increment of storage and necessary treatment to provide progress towards the level of restoration envisioned in CERP that is above and beyond CEPP. It improves the amount of time Lake Okeechobee is in the preferred ecological stage envelope. It decreases the number of extreme low lake events and improves water shortage cutback performance. Capital cost to implement will be \$1.34 billion. The ASA CW determined the project feasible and transmitted the report to OMB on May 30, 2018. The record of decision is expected by September 30, 2018. They have several different schedules in the feasibility study and it could potentially be designed and constructed in 10 years if they have all the funding in place

Terrie Bates reflected how the partners are committed to Everglades restoration and work to find creative ways to move projects forward even when there are obstacles. James Evans applauded the SFWMD for their efforts on this and added that the City of Sanibel is very supportive of this project.

4. Integrated Delivery Schedule (IDS) Update

Kim Taplin provided a presentation reminding everyone that the last formally vetted IDS was before the TF in December 2016. She reviewed the history of the IDS starting with the Yellow Book and the Master Implementation Sequencing Plan (MISP). The IDS provides a schedule and sequencing plan for achieving restoration benefits as soon as possible consistent with state and federal authorizations and funding. The IDS is not an agency action or decision document and is a tool to provide guidance to decision-makers. Regular updates are required in consultation with the TF and stakeholder input. It is a living document that is updated as needed to reflect progress and/or program changes. Current implementation will be based on FY18 allocation of \$76.5 million for the Corps and \$154 million for the SFWMD. FY19 potential implementation will be based on \$67.5 million for the Corps and \$215 million for the SFWMD. Once the FY18 allocations for the Corps are finalized, the IDS will be updated and presented to the TF at its July 2018 meeting.

5. 2018 Task Force Reporting Requirements

Biennial Report - Marsha Bansee reminded everyone that the TF is required to report biennially on activities and progress made toward restoration. The next report will provide a summary of restoration progress during the two-year reporting period, July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2018. In prior years the Biennial Report was organized by goals. The new format will highlight major accomplishments by program or category. It will include additional sections on science, system-wide ecological indicators and TF activities. The new format will make it easier to see progress by program area. Projects can still be viewed by strategic goal/measurable objective on the web. The Strategy will remain a more static document providing detailed background information. The first draft of the Biennial Report will go out to the WG and SCG members for comments in July. The final draft of the Biennial Report will be submitted to the WG/SCG for acceptance and for TF approval in the fall. Allyn Childress asked for member input on the draft that will be circulated. Deb Drum offered to provide some information after the meeting on some of the regional restoration projects that could be included.

System-wide Ecological Indicators – Laura Brandt explained that a part of the reporting is on the ecological progress towards Everglades restoration. There is a full stand-alone report for System-wide Ecological Indicators for Everglades Restoration and a condensed version which is included within the Biennial Report. She provided a presentation explaining that the full report contains an introduction and expanded hydrologic context getting into the details of the hydrology by area. Each indicator has its own chapter where the scientists discuss their key findings. This is an opportunity for the scientists to provide additional information on how they have updated their indicators, show how the data has been used and how it relates to upcoming restoration decisions. Information is also provided on the publications that have been produced. The indicators section within the Biennial Report has a bit of background on where the indicators came from, why they are important, the hydrologic context for the water years and provides the status of the 11 system-wide ecological indicators. The indicators section in the Biennial Report will also be updated and sent out for comment in July.

6. Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team (BBRRCT) Update

Phil Everingham noted he has been the Chair of the team for the last couple of years. This team came about because of the Biscayne Bay Partnership Initiative twenty years ago. The focus at that time was on

funding for Biscayne Bay and despite the best efforts of that initiative and others since then, they still lack funding. The BBRRCT has been an advisory body to the WG for about 15 years. They initially developed action plans but due to lack of resources the team changed its approach several years ago and now focuses on priority issues and focus areas. Priority issues for Biscayne Bay include water quality, freshwater needs, access, restoring and protecting habitat, sustainable coastal development, sea-level rise and coastal resiliency. Focus areas include BBCW Phases 1 and 2, agency coordination, stakeholder needs and interests, and finding more freshwater for the bay. He reviewed the team membership and noted there are 3 vacancies they are in the process of filling. The team meets monthly and looks forward to communicating more frequently with the WG and SCG on issues related to Biscayne Bay.

James Erskine noted he appreciated the update on the role the BBRRCT plays and the services it can perform as they move into the future.

Public Comment

Nyla Pipes (One Florida Foundation) said she had great concern about the C-23 and C-24 Reservoirs being pushed out in the IDS timeline. She understood some things were moved around because of budget issues but there is a tendency to forget that those projects are an important part of the IRL-South. They get 79% of the discharges to the St. Lucie River from their local watershed. The North Fork of the St. Lucie River has a ton of nutrient loading occurring year-round and it dumps into the South Fork of the St. Lucie River. The problem is compounded when they get these discharges from Lake Okeechobee. If they continue to make national headlines because their estuaries are algae ridden, then they are going to have a harder time convincing a Congressman from Oregon to support Everglades restoration. She encouraged them to complete the IRL-South.

Celeste DePalma (Audubon of Florida) thanked COL Kirk for his dedication to America's Everglades and congratulated the SFWMD and the Corps for getting the EAA PACR done. Audubon was looking forward to getting a swift review by OMB and authorization by Congress. There needs to be continuity with construction funding and she urged them to update the IDS. They have an opportunity to better educate the public on how water flows through the system and she encouraged the group to think of better ways to communicate what the constraints are so that the whole story is told.

Cara Capp (NPCA) stated NPCA is very supportive of the EAA Reservoir moving forward and congratulated the entire team. Modified Water Deliveries is nearing completion which is tremendous news and the state is advancing construction on CEPP south. Funding levels from the federal government is troubling. The President's Budget of \$67.5 million is not enough to keep up with CERP and the tremendous commitment from the state. NPCA urges the Administration to capitalize on the tremendous opportunities and closed by saying that NPCA will continue to push for more money.

7. Developing Enhanced Communication Tools

Allyn Childress provided a live demo of the web based briefing tool, developed by staff at OERI and ENP with the intent of conveying information on Everglades restoration to a broader audience. Many people do not realize the complexity or the variety of landscapes that are part of the ecosystem. The link to the briefing tool will be provided to the members for their review and feedback. Pedro Ramos added that this tool could be one of many that can be used to communicate with people outside of this group. He stressed the importance of communicating well to have the support they need to continue doing this work.

8. Florida Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs)

Samantha Yuan provided a presentation on the Florida Invasive Species Partnership (FISP) which was founded in 2008. The FISP's mission is to facilitate partnerships that prevent and control the threat of invasive species on public and private lands and waters in Florida. She reviewed which organizations are involved in the group as well as the partnership's goals. FISP serves as the umbrella organization for the 16 CISMAs. CISMAs work to improve effectiveness and management across the landscape. They are always looking for more partners and members were encouraged to get involved.

Tony Pernas reviewed the Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (ECISMA) that formed in 2006 that covers the entire Everglades area from Palm Beach County to mainland Monroe County as well as a portion of Collier County. They have a formal partnership with a signed MOU. He reviewed the organizational structure that includes a strike team, capable of responding rapidly to new plants and animals with the goal of eradicating them. The take home message of the invasion curve is that costs are way down when they respond rapidly to a new species. Once a species gets established it requires a long-term commitment. They have a website (EvergladesCISMA.org) and a way for citizens or scientists to report species through www.EDDMapS.org as well as a hotline. They have an annual newsletter and an annual Everglades Invasive Species Summit.

Dennis Giardina reported on a breeding population of Nile monitor lizards around the Homestead Air Reserve Base, a population of Argentine black and white tegus in Florida City as well as a population of Northern African Pythons which are reproducing in our ecosystem. He also reported on the mangrove species from southeast Asia, *Lumnitzera racemosa*, which escaped from Fairchild Botanical Garden and invaded Matheson Hammock County Park. FWC provides millions of dollars to the Invasive Plant Management Section to control invasive exotic plants on 11 million acres of public conservation land. In 2015/16 they funded approximately 150 projects statewide at a cost of \$17 million. One of the things they are concerned about is the emerald ash borer which vectors a disease of ash trees. Friends of ECISMA raises funds to provide the materials necessary for rapid response and outreach efforts. Both the Miccosukee and Seminole Indian tribes participate in their events and collaborate with them.

Sarah Funk added FWC has started a python removal contractor program like the SFWMD's program. The two entities have worked together to align those programs so that they can cover more ground. Between both programs they have 50 people who are compensated to search for and remove pythons. Over a thousand pythons have been removed through the FWC and SFWMD programs. The program has been expanded to include all conditional non-native and injurious constrictors. FWC also runs the 1-888-I've-Got-1 hotline which is statewide and uses volunteers to help remove high priority species. They recently partnered with ENP to allow FWC contractors to work within the park boundaries. They are getting the contracts finalized and hope to have boots on the ground in July.

Pedro Ramos said that ENP and FWC have partnered to expand efforts to remove pythons within the park. This partnership will triple the size of their authorized agent program and allow them to remove and euthanize snakes in the field. ENP is showing flexibility in allowing people who have been properly vetted by FWC to use a firearm. He also thanked Commissioner Mike Sole for supporting the partnership. James Erskine said the WG and SCG could benefit from continued communication and will be looking at some future agenda items.

Public Comment

Kelly Ralston (American Sport Fishing Assoc.) noted she works for the trade association representing the sport fishing industry and they represent millions of anglers across the state and country. In Florida, recreational fishing has a \$9.6 billion economic impact, freshwater and saltwater combined, and supports

over 128,000 jobs. They have been working at the federal and state level to secure funding to move Everglades restoration projects forward as quickly as possible. They support the EAA storage reservoir and hope it's included in this year's WRDA bill. They support the full funding of the Herbert Hoover Dike repairs through the supplemental funding. They pledge to continue supporting the restoration effort and she thanked the group for their commitment to Everglades restoration.

9. National Research Council (NRC) Report

Bob Johnson said there is a Congressional requirement to have this external peer review process that is sponsored by the Corps, the State of Florida and DOI. While not everyone agrees on the details of restoration there is universal agreement to use the best possible science. His presentation reviewed the reports provided by the first committee which were thematic topical reports. The current committee, Committee on the Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP), was established in 2005. CISRERP has produced six biennial reports and the seventh is underway. The committee has had four open meetings and two field trips in south Florida. The topical areas include: the restoration plan in context; implementation progress; new topics (CEPP/PACR, WERP, LOWRP, Florida Bay initiative, high water and storage); and science and decision making. The draft report will go to the sponsors in early September for a 10-day fact checking period and then there is a roll out and briefing for the sponsors. The report will be publicly available in October 2018.

Next Steps and Closing Comments

The draft minutes from the September 2016 meeting were presented for approval. A motion was made and seconded and the minutes were approved without objection. COL Kirk reminded everyone of the no host social. Next meeting will be in the fall. Anyone interested in serving as WG Vice Chair should contact James Erskine. The TF will meet in Washington, DC on July 25th. COL Kirk said it was an honor both personally and professionally to be a part of this body. James Erskine thanked the FWC members as well as the other partners who participated. Marshall Critchfield thanked Pedro Ramos, Shannon Estenoz and Bob Johnson for helping him get up to speed on these topics and the OERI team for putting this meeting together.

Meeting adjourned at 2:40PM.

Handouts:

- 1) Administrative Item
 - a) Agenda
 - b) Draft minutes, September 2016 meeting
- 2) Program and Project Update
 - a) Corps presentation
 - b) SFWMD presentation
- 3) CEPP presentation
- 4) Integrated Delivery Schedule presentation
- 5) Task Force reporting requirements presentation
- 6) Florida Cooperative Invasive Species
 - a) Samantha Yuan's Presentation
 - b) Tony Pernas' Presentation
 - c) Dennis Giardina's Presentation
- 7) NRC Report presentation